

SERPENTINE LORE.

Interesting Scientific Facts About Poisonous Snakes.

Different Effects of the Venom of Various Reptiles—The Deadly Marine Snakes of the Indian Ocean.

The following facts are given by a snake scientist, a man, in fact, who knows what he is talking about. Such a one is Dr. Leonard Stejneger, in charge of the reptilian department of the national museum at Washington. He said to a correspondent of the Boston Transcript:

"You do not admire snakes, I suppose? Well, it is all a matter of taste. There was Prof. Baird, former secretary of the Smithsonian institution. He swallowed the poison glands of the rattlesnake one day, just to make sure that the venom was harmless when taken internally. The experiment was a risky one; I would have advised him against it. At all events, it is well that he did not try the poison glands of a cobra.

"You see," continued the doctor, gently stroking with his finger the head of a harmless living snake to give the creature pleasure, "the poisons are different. Each of them contains two distinct active principles, one of which produces local symptoms in case of a bite, while the other has a tendency to paralyze the nervous centers of the victim. The latter preponderates in the cobra venom. A wound made by the tooth of that species of serpent is a mere puncture and causes little swelling. The person bitten is killed by paralysis of the nerve centers. The danger of the rattlesnake bite, on the other hand, is from mortification of the injured part, which may proceed so far that the flesh actually petrifies. Cobra poison in its natural state is one of those fluids which are able to pass through membranes. If swallowed it would be apt to go through the walls of the alimentary tract and get into the circulation in that way.

"That is a python," he said, "but it is not a very large one. The species attains a length of thirty feet and a diameter of a foot. If I met such a serpent would my scientific knowledge give me a better chance in an encounter with it? Well, perhaps. Notwithstanding my enthusiasm as a collector, I would certainly run away if I could. Supposing that the animal seized me, it is probable that I would keep my wits better than the average citizen would under such circumstances. The only thing to do would be to grasp the creature by the throat and try to strangle it. The other day I read a statement to the effect that the proper course to pursue in an emergency of the kind was to take hold of the tail of the snake and unwind the constricting coils from that end. In my opinion that would be a poor plan to adopt with a python, inasmuch as its tail is the strongest part of it, being made powerful for holding on.

"The tooth of a rattlesnake or cobra is so sharp an instrument that beneath a powerful microscope the point looks perfectly smooth, whereas under the same magnifier the point of a needle appears rough. It often happens that an ignorant person will remove the poison fangs of a venomous serpent, imagining that the operation renders the animal permanently harmless. This mistake is apt to give rise to fatal accidents. Within a few days the next two teeth behind the extracted fangs move forward and establish a connection with the poison glands. Then the snake is as dangerous as ever. Fakirs in India understand a more effective process. They cut out the poison glands and apply hot irons, destroying the parts entirely. Even the deadly cobra may be rendered in that way as innocuous as a kitten.

"My scientific ardor has never induced me to try the effects of snake bites on my own person. But several of the people attached to the staff of the National Museum have been bitten. Mr. Schindler permitted a coral snake to bite him in order that he might study the results. Our taxidermist, Joseph Palmer, narrowly escaped a nip from a rattlesnake, which was torpid and came to life while he was handling it. Dr. Schufeldt was bitten by a Gila monster and suffered considerably in consequence. A man ought always to be willing to sacrifice himself for the sake of getting knowledge. A certain person in the employ of the Smithsonian institution, whose name I will discreetly withhold, found a peanut in the stomach of a Peruvian mummy and ate it. He wanted to see if anything would happen.

"Among the most venomous serpents in the world are the marine snakes of the Indian ocean. They are the dread of fishermen, and it sometimes happens that vessels are obliged to thread their cables through barrels in order to prevent the reptiles from swarming on board. Great numbers of them may often be seen floating on the surface of the water as if asleep. They are exceedingly fierce, and will commonly attack human beings without provocation. The so-called 'hoopsnake' is a favorite snake of the newspapers. It is said to take its tail in its mouth and roll like a hoop. This belief may be accounted for by the fact that the snake has a way of accomplishing locomotion by extending itself at full length, bringing its hinder part into a loop and springing forward, repeating the operation with such rapidity that to the eye it might produce the effect of rolling hoop-fashion."

Canada's Field Pea Crop.

The field pea is an important crop in Canada, partly because it succeeded in localities where corn cannot be grown and partly because in many localities the pea weevil, which infests peas grown in the states, is not known. It was long the habit of farmers near the Canada line to send north for seed peas free from the weevil. When Canada seed peas were procured each spring, one or two crops and sometimes more could be grown in the states free from bugs before the pest would reappear.

HE NAMED THE TOWN.

A Choking Indian Responsible for Keokuk's Peculiar Cognomen.

"Just been out in Keokuk. Hottest place in Iowa," said a weary traveler the other day. "Wonder why they have such towns on the map. Only place there that appears to do any business is the steam laundry. What does the name Keokuk mean, anyway?"

"Indians named it," said a traveling man, in the rotunda.

"Wish they had forgotten to," sighed the weary wayfarer.

"Ever hear how it came about?" asked the drummer.

"Never," replied the traveler, as he sank, exhausted, into a chair.

"Well, it was in this way," said the commercial man, sitting down. "Years ago a lone Indian walked across the plains looking for game and trouble. He shot a prairie chicken, built a fire near the river and cooked his bird on what is now the site of Keokuk."

"Was this in the summer time?" asked the traveler.

"It was," said the drummer.

"Don't see why he needed a fire to cook a chicken, then."

"Never mind about that. He cooked his chicken and proceeded to demolish it. As he sat upon the river bank engaged in this pleasing pastime it suddenly occurred to him that some day there might be a great city built where he was sitting."

"The red man was fooled," said the traveler.

"Well," continued the drummer, not heeding the interruption, "he thought to give that great city a name, and he chose, the chicken still in his hand, and prepared to register the name with the winds of heaven. Just then a bone stuck in his throat and all he could say was 'Ke-o-kuk.'"

Then the two men clinched and the porter pulled them apart.

TREE MINES.

A Curious Industry of Southern Asia—Logs Excellent for Coffins.

One of the most curious industries in the world is the business of mining for coffin planks which is carried on in Upper Tonquin, a portion of the French possessions in southeastern Asia. In a certain district in this province there exists a great underground deposit of logs, which were probably the trunks of trees engulfed by an earthquake or some other convulsion of nature at a comparatively recent period.

The trees, says the Youth's Companion, are a species of pine known to the natives, and also to some extent to European commerce, as nam-hou. The wood is almost imperishable, and has the quality, either through its nature or as the result of its sojourn underground, of resisting decay from damp. This quality makes it particularly valuable for the manufacture of coffins, and for this purpose it is largely exported to Europe.

The trees are often a yard in diameter. They are buried in sandy earth to a depth of from two to eight yards, and are dug up by native labor as de-